BRADBURY, Benjamin Franklin, one of the oldest residents of Eppards Point Township, Livingston County, Ill., a thorough and successful farmer, a man of a high order of intelligence and of broad and varied information, and regarded by all as a leading and eminently useful character in his locality, has lived in Livingston County for forty years, having been brought to the county by his parents when he was a lad of twelve years.

He was born in Peoria County, Ill., on July 7, 1857. His father, Joseph Sanders Bradbury, who was half-owner of a large sawmill in West Virginia, moved from that State to Peoria County in 1850. His mill in Virginia had an extensive run in the lumber regions of that State, furnishing ties and bridge timbers for new railroads, lumber material for steamboats and the necessary mill material for various other commercial uses.

The cloud of secession was then already lowering over that region, the religious element was divided into North and South Churches, and men often carried fire-arms with them to their places of worship. The parents of Mr. Bradbury entertained anti-slavery sentiments, which, even at that early period, subjected his property to hazards, and made the conditions surrounding his wife and children not altogether free from danger. While the Southerner seemed cordial towards those Northern people who were furthering the enterprises they desired to develop, they were nevertheless plainly getting ready for a conflict which they deemed inevitable, which would establish a Confederacy based on slavery, under the domination of King Cotton.

Slavery, however, was too revolting an institution for the elder Bradbury to uphold, and war in its behalf was a dreadful alternative to be awaited, and for this reason he sold his interests to his partner, who was a college professor, a typical son of the old Dominion, a genial gentleman and considerate towards his slaves. With a substantial profit resulting from the disposition of his share in the saw-mill, the father with his wife and family moved to Illinois, settling in Peoria County.

The birthplace of Benjamin P. Bradbury was a snug little cottage containing six rooms, being one of the most comfortably arranged of the pioneer dwellings in that locality. He was next to the youngest of six living children who reached years of maturity. The father, who was the first of the family to die, was born in Amherst, N. H., July 22, 1811, and grew to manhood in that State, going thence to New York City, and learning the trade of a printer in the office where Horace Greeley was taking the same course. In later years, together, with an elder brother, William L. Bradbury, he was engaged in publishing the New York Sun. This brother died of smallpox, at that time a wide-spread epidemic, sweeping off residents of the city by hundreds.

Being thus left without a partner in the newspaper enterprise, the father continued to publish the Sun alone for several years. It was a profitable enterprise, having a very fine job-work patronage from first-class business men.

Some unique specimens of advertisements then printed in that office are still in the possession of his descendants. These are very large leaf, or sheet cards of unusually heavy printing paper, with a most exquisite, mahoganized, marbled or sea-blue color. On

these are printed, in artistic type and manner, and in gold, silver or bright bronze, the announcements of hotels, marine lines, commercial houses, etc. Few people of the present time have ever beheld more superb typographical work or beautiful paper. At that time it was a very expensive but common and effective method among those of large means, of exploiting business enterprises in large cities.

Having been seized with an optical ailment, Joseph S. Bradbury was finally compelled to dispose of his business interests in New York, and, under the advice of his physician, to seek an outdoor life in a milder climate, he accordingly moved to Wheeling, W. Va., and as previously indicated, engaged in the manufacture of lumber material. His health being much improved by this change, he was induced to abandon his Virginia occupation, and in order to continue in his out-of-door pursuits, to adopt agricultural pursuits in a pioneer settlement on. the prairies of Illinois.

In this region, Peoria was then the only home market for grains and cereals. The farmers in those days shelled corn by hand-shellers, and trampled their grain out with horses, or in some cases flailed it out, as was most convenient. . The scythe was then in vogue, and the odd-looking cradle was the "harvesting machine." The sturdy farmers of early times were thus inured to exertion which would prove fatal to many of the modern younger agriculturists.

Farm labor at the present day is in many parts a song accompaniment to life, and homes and beautiful fields now gladden the landscape which was once the scene of the toils and struggles of the hardy pioneers.

The maiden name of Benjamin P. Bradbury's mother was Mary Mercena Lunt, and she was born in Newburyport, Mass., August 17, 1813, and there received her education in the public schools and academy, subsequently teaching school in that town for many years. She was a cousin of his father, who also had acquired an academic education in his native place, and they were sweethearts throughout their wedded life, giving to their children an ideal home, which is held in hallowed memory. The remains of both parents lie in the quaint little cemetery near the old homestead, where repose the ashes of many of the early settlers of that locality.

The grandfather on the paternal side was William Bradbury, son of Daniel Bradbury, who was a soldier in the Revolutionary War and was killed in the Battle of White Plains. William Bradbury was a wheelwright and carriage-maker by trade, and was also a talented musician, and an instructor in music. The ancestral line of the family was of French-English origin. The maternal grandfather was Richard Lunt, a sailor boy for twenty years, and a sea captain for fifty years later. He was the owner of a merchant vessel which plied between the eastern and southern shores of the United States and the West India Islands, including also the coast of South America bordering on the Caribbean Sea.

Twice during his career as a navigator, he witnessed the slaughter of human life resulting from insurrections in those regions, the Spaniards driving their helpless victims down to

the seashore, and after literally cutting them into pieces, casting the mangled bodies of the slain into the waves. In his younger clays, this venerable seaman had some experience in the War of 1812, being twice captured by the British Marines, and his cargoes being confiscated in each instance. It so happened, however, that in both cases his vessel was retaken by United States cruisers.

In the long period of his sea service he was never shipwrecked. A photograph of the veteran sailor at the age of ninety-nine years represents him as unbent in form, with classic features and eyes as bright as those of a child. He died in his one hundredth year from the effects of a fall upon a sleet-covered sidewalk, and was laid to rest in the cemetery at Newburyport. the city out of which he had sailed for so many years.

Cutting Lunt, uncle of Richard Lunt, was one of the heroic mariners belonging to the crews of John Paul Jones, the illustrious naval commander who, with his three comparatively small vessels, scoured the British waters, destroying the enemy's merchantmen and much shore property. In one of the coast raids quite a number of Commodore Jones' sailors were captured and held as prisoners of war, undergoing severe privations, and among these heroes was Cutting Lunt. Many of the unfortunate prisoners succumbed under the burden of their hardship, dying in captivity, and Cutting Lunt yielded up his life a few days before he was to have been released, the war having been brought to a close.

Benjamin F. Bradbury received an excellent school education in his youth, obtained under the ablest of instructors, and subsequently attended the high school, matriculating also in Eureka College, but not taking the full course. Several of his preceptors were ministers of the Gospel, and their names and characters linger in his memory as suggestions of wholesome and beneficent lives. He has taught school and holds both the second and first grade teacher's certificates, but having the opportunity to engage more profitably in farming, has applied his energies in that direction.

Throughout his agricultural experience he has never, however, ceased to maintain a process of educating himself, and has spent much time in studying the languages and many of the higher and more technical branches of science.

During the last six years, in his intervals of leisure, he has made a most searching study of astronomy, geography and meteorology, for the purpose of preparing an astro-geographical chart on which long range forecasts of weather could be based with reasonable certainty. This chart is intended to reorganize the old principles and methods of weather science, adding materially in the way of new and provable knowledge in meteorology.

The subject of this sketch is a bachelor. He owns the old homestead of his boyhood, fraught with memories of early days ; for the old familiar district school, Lakeside District 87, is in plain sight. There stand the stately trees which his childhood hands planted, and where the birds have sung their songs among the leaves and branches throughout the summers of many lapsing years, his life's dream of happiness has been

beautifully realized. With a farm well kept and under thorough cultivation through his own industry; with a cozy home well supplied with good books, papers and magazines, and walls hung with pleasing pictures; with flowers on the lawn to greet the advent of the season of bloom, and all material things to afford charm and cheer, Mr. Bradbury dwells in contentment, one of the most favorably known citizens of Livingston County.

Politically, although of Democratic paternity, Mr. Bradbury has been wont to vote the Republican ticket for Presidential candidates and on national issues. Especially, he supports those commending themselves to his judgment as best qualified for the various offices. He has served as School Director in the old home district of his childhood for twenty-one consecutive years, having acted in the capacity of clerk of the board since his first election. Fraternally, he is affiliated with the M. W. A. and the I. O. O. F. In matters pertaining to religious faith, his inclination is towards the Quaker belief of his ancestors, but be has occupied a liberal position towards all Christian denominations, and is in all respects a public-spirited member of the community.

Transcribed from the 1909 Volume 2 Livingston County, Illinois, history book by Dale C. Maley - Livingston County Historian, on July 16, 2024